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FM AMEMBASSY BISHKEK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8672
INFO RUEHHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT IMMEDIATE 4251
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA IMMEDIATE 1655
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE IMMEDIATE 1407
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 0287
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT IMMEDIATE 0870

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 001730

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN
DEPT ALSO FOR DS/IP/SPC - WEINBERG
DEPT ALSO FOR DS/IP/NEA/SA - GALLO
ASTANA FOR LEGATT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/07/2016

TAGS: ASEC CASC KG PGOV PINR PREL

SUBJECT: BISHKEK EAC MEETING ON RECOMMENDATION TO REOPEN
USAID OFFICE IN OSH

REF: A. BISHKEK 1602

¶B. BISHKEK 1621

Classified By: Amb. Marie L. Yovanovitch, Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) The Ambassador chaired an EAC meeting the morning of December 6. In attendance were AMB, DCM, POL/ECON, POL/RA, PAS, MGT, DAO, CONS, CLO, Peace Corps, USAID, MED, RSL, Manas Airbase, and RSO. Also attending was USAID Regional Deputy Director Delaney from Almaty.

¶2. (C) The Bishkek EAC met to discuss making a recommendation to send forward to the Department (as required by State 344921, Subject: Guidelines for Temporary Closure to the Public) on whether to reopen the USAID office in the city of Osh in Southern Kyrgyzstan. Operations in the Osh office were suspended on November 16 due to security concerns following the abduction of the USAID Country Representative's spouse at gun point on November 11 (See Reftels).

¶3. (C) DCM briefly reviewed the case and reported that in the three weeks since the incident there have been a few new leads, but nothing leading to apprehension of the named suspect who drove the stolen vehicle to Osh. The FBI sent a forensics team to Osh to collect DNA, fiber, and other evidence from the recovered stolen vehicle, but without a suspect the evidence is of little value to the investigation. While driving the stolen vehicle from Bishkek to Osh, the suspect had an accident. The other driver in the accident has been interviewed and provided the suspect's name and description and may be able to identify the suspect if he is apprehended.

¶4. (C) To date no link has been discovered between the abduction in Bishkek and the stolen vehicle being dropped off in the parking lot of the USAID office in Osh. If the driver of the stolen vehicle could be apprehended, he may be able to clarify this issue. There is a scrap metal company with offices in the same USAID office building in Osh. The company is rumored to have a connection with a member of Parliament, who is believed to have an affiliation with organized crime in Osh, but so far no link has been established nor is there proof of the alleged links to an MP.

¶5. (C) The investigation has revealed no indications of a specific threat to USAID employees in the Osh office. As there also has never been an indication of a threat against USAID employees in the Bishkek office (aside from the specific threat to the Country Representative and his wife),

USAID's Bishkek operations have remained open since the incident. The Ambassador, DCM met with the Osh employees on December 6, who expressed their desire to return to work and made some suggestions for improving security at the Osh building. They recommend a step already considered by RSO: arming all three MVD guards on site, instead of just one as is currently the case. They noted that, in their view, keeping operations suspended actually draws more attention to them than would resuming operations. RSO will reiterate to MVD the importance of investigating the possible link of the firm in the building to the member of Parliament who may be involved with organized crime. RSO noted that security could be enhanced by exploring the possibility of restricting parking around the Osh office building and request Diplomatic Security (DS)to add recording capability to the security monitors that are installed around the interior and exterior of the building. DCM also recommended, with RSO support, that the Embassy request DS send a Threat Assessment Team on an urgent basis to assess the Osh office and its location, as well as USAID offices in Embassy Bishkek, and to recommend additional security upgrades if necessary.

¶6. (C) RSO pointed out that the stolen vehicle was moved to the MVD compound in Osh where the FBI Team collected forensic evidence, so the large MVD presence drawing attention to the USAID office is no longer there. The office does not have signage visible from the street identifying it as a USG office, but diplomatic plated vehicles are parked in the lot behind the building. Osh is a small town, and it is likely that most long-term residents know the office exists even if they are not aware of its exact location. RSO stated that the office does not meet DS setback requirements. MGT officer stated that, given the security problems of the current office, this may be the ideal time to relocate to a

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different office site that does not pose such risks. Ambassador noted that such situations transform a security issue into a budget issue, and that relocating to a new building would likely take several months, leading to open-ended suspension of operations in Osh.

¶7. (C) Following discussion of several scenarios for resuming operations at the USAID office in Osh, Ambassador proposed that the Embassy recommend to the Department to authorize resumption of operations in Osh next week, once the USAID Osh Director Shelton, who returns from leave December 9, has had an opportunity to reassess the situation on the ground. Resumption of activities should be contingent on all three MVD guards being armed. The other steps proposed by the RSO to upgrade security would be pursued concurrent with resumption of operations. The committee agreed unanimously with this recommendation.

¶8. (SBU) In accordance with the EAC, the Embassy has submitted a cable to the Department recommending resumption of operations at the USAID Osh facility, under the conditions outlined above. Another EAC meeting will be convened as needed.

YOVANOVITCH